# The New Breed



## *Americans in Vietnam Serve as Both Soldiers and Diplomats*



By PHILIP GEYELIN

WASHINGTON—The President's office doubtless offers the best view in Government of all the myriad elements—political, military, economic and psychological—that make up Vietnam's war. Move on, and authority diffuses, lines of special interest feed out through a half-dozen individual department and agency chiefs and their advisers, and total comprehension exists mostly in a loose, collective sense.

But it all comes back together again, to a remarkable extent, at the other end of the bureaucratic scale. Or so, at any rate, it did for this reporter on a recent trip through the delta area just south of Saigon by jeep.

*This is the second of two articles based on the author's firsthand observations. The first appeared yesterday.*

At the wheel, in slacks and sports shirt, with a carbine between his knees, was James MacGill, U.S. Army captain of infantry. Beside him, in camouflage-cloth fatigues, wearing a cartridge belt with hunting knife attached, and carbine in hand, sat Frank Scotton, aspiring Foreign Service officer now on the payroll of the United States Information Agency.

Foot soldier and career diplomat sound worlds apart. But these two are as professionally interchangeable as their appearances imply. Both are in their 20s; both speak fluent Vietnamese; both are equally versed in the handling of small arms, in the revolutionary doctrines of Mao Tse-tung, in the quiet application of diplomacy to some touchy political problem with a province chief, in the training of local militiamen to shoot a Browning automatic rifle or string barbed wire.

Both, in short, inhabit the same small but expanding world of America's "New Breed" of soldier-diplomat (or diplomat-soldier), whose unique range of talents has grown out of active duty in a unique form of political war. Even a brief time spent in their company, and that of others of their kind scattered by the dozens through the Vietnam hinterlands and in Saigon offices, offers some revealing insights to the sort of struggle this is and the assortment of talents it requires. It also suggests why a greater effort may be needed to develop and encourage this particular expertise.

The most comfortable way to travel with a Scotton or MacGill is to know as little about their habits as possible before you set off—with a borrowed carbine and two clips of ammunition clutched aimlessly in hand. Time enough after returning to be told that they tend to travel on roads not rated proof against a Communist Vietcong checkpoint, or on ways known to be regularly mined by devices set along the soft-shoulder and triggered by wire whenever an interesting target passes by. Later is also the time to find out that they frequent villages, in contested areas, where the Vietcong also move freely about, that their friends and acquaintances include not only a rich variety of "loyalist" Vietnamese but also a few whose loyalty is in doubt.

"The job calls for it," explained one Saigon official later, "so these fellows take chances that other people would rather not take."

### Dangers Along the Way

Even without this information in advance, the conversation stimulates the adrenalin. Suddenly stepping harder on the accelerator, MacGill waves toward a distant tree line and explains that somebody shot at him from that vantage point a day or so earlier. Again, as we speed up to hurtle past a roadside rockpile, Scotton is good enough to explain that the Vietcong delight in mining roadside gravel heaps, and to describe the fate of a province chief whose official limousine was shredded by flying rocks just recently when a mine was detonated by a wire leading back into the protection of the rice paddies that line the road.

Shoptalk on this inspection tour of militia training posts ranges over the merits and demerits of traveling armed (weapons invite suspicion and attack, but without them you are at the mercy of roadblock or sniper); on the advantage of painting your jeep a gaudy pastel shade to make it look a little less militant; on what measure of protection against mines is provided by the layer of sandbags atop the floor boards; on what to do when suddenly confronted by a Vietcong checkpoint (either throw the vehicle into reverse and race backward, or else roar through; turning around takes too much time and risks getting stuck in a ditch); on the best ways to sling a hammock, evade mosquitos, avoid dysentery.

But uppermost in the conversation are the political as well as the military aspects of this war, the techniques of the enemy, the proper conduct of counter-insurgency. Quickly it becomes apparent that both men are scholars as well as warriors. Scotton's Saigon house, while comfortably unexceptional in other respects, is notable for the small arsenal in a coat closet that might have been expected to hold golf clubs, for the guest room piled high with surplus Army mosquito nets, blankets, and field packs—and a library filled with books dealing almost exclusively with guerrilla war.

"Field representatives" are engaged in a wide assortment of jobs, for USIA, AID,

the State Department as well as the armed services. In the broadest sense, the calling embraces virtually "Americans Overseas" in an isolated Montagnard camp in the highlands whose advisory role ranges from the preparation of fortifications to the digging of wells and the provisioning of food and other necessities. It includes Americans working in province, or district, or village headquarters, counseling local Vietnamese authorities on propaganda, hygiene, school-building, rehabilitation of defectors, refugee care, improvement of local police, "home guard" protection.

For all the diversity of assignment, the New Breed shares a common quality; all are passionately persuaded that the Vietnam conflict is, at heart, a political affair, to be won not just by force of arms, however welcome the expanding U.S. combat role, but by conducting a "counter-revolution" against the Vietcong. This sense of revolution is strong (jokingly, the true believers refer to their loose fraternity as the "revolutionaries"). It is rooted in the theory, accepted with varying readiness higher up, that—whatever negotiated settlement might someday emerge—only a Saigon government which can be persuaded to counter the Communists with its own social-democratic program of reforms can hope to survive the struggle.

Yet another distinguishing quality of the New Breed is to see this as not one war but maybe several hundred, requiring a variety of approaches. The problem in the central highlands, where Vietcong units operate at battalion or even regimental strength, is a thing apart from the hit-and-run guerrilla activity or just plain terrorism that still prevails in much of the delta, they will argue, and each district presents a somewhat special problem, depending on the effectiveness of the particular Vietcong unit there, the local government leadership, the popular mood.

## An Emotional Involvement

To an awareness of complexity, common to the New Breed, one must add profound emotional involvement. This varies in intensity, of course; some are more ready than others to get on, after a few years, with their normal careers. But most are deeply dedicated to pursuing the conflict in Vietnam, and most share the front-line expert's swashbuckling disdain for the cool detachment and glittering generalities of their superiors. Most of them are also quick to criticize the rule-book reflexes and case-hardened thought patterns that are so often a part of big bureaucracy.

Not surprisingly, the feeling's mutual; the New Breed is looked upon by many higher-ups as perhaps a little unruly, emotionally over-committed, even a touch eccentric. Though it's official Government policy to encourage extension of Vietnam tours, which now require service for no more than a year and a half in the case of the State Department and two years for some other agencies, many of the New Breed, especially those in the military, find themselves under unofficial pressure to try a change of scene when their tour is up.

Older officers counsel their juniors, for instance, that specialization on Vietnam could damage their careers. Somewhat the same thinking applies to the diplomats, the older hands especially; while quite prepared to do their hitch, most are reported not much interested in the 10-month language course that might lead on to lengthy specialization [illegible] bar dependents.

Recently, special inducements have been added, especially for such noncareer activities as foreign aid. AID personnel now are granted housing allowances to settle their families closer by, in Hong Kong or Bangkok; a "hardship" pay bonus has also been granted. But recruitment remains a headache, and a number of high officials, including new Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, are known to favor greater efforts to develop and exploit counter-insurgency expertise, by way of increasing emphasis on the "political" aspects of the war.

## The Lansdale Mission

A somewhat exploratory first step: The dispatch to Saigon, as a special Lodge assistant, of retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Edward E. Lansdale, one-time CIA operative, with wide experience in "un-conventional" warfare against the Communist Huks in the Philippines and in the early days of the Vietnam affair. Controversial within the government, Mr. Lansdale and the 10-man "political action" team he will be taking with him may not prove the ideal answer to the question of how to foster the arts and sciences of counter-insurgency in Vietnam. But the philosophy he expressed last year in a Foreign Affairs article ("The Communists have let loose a revolutionary idea in Vietnam, and it will not die by being ignored, bombed or smothered by us") at least reflects a developing sense of need.

"If you figure the war in Vietnam will be over in 18 months or so, then the present personnel turnover and the lack of any real effort to build up a more permanent body of expertise is acceptable," says one high Administration official. "But if you think that Vietnam is going to go on for five or ten years, which a lot of people do, and that wars of 'liberation' are going to be a problem for a lot longer time than that, perhaps something a good deal more ambitious needs to be done."

The argument for at least a bureaucratic overhaul is summed up by the sort of gibberish you are likely to encounter if you ask a simple question of the U.S. embassy in Saigon: "If USOM can't help you," you may well be told, "try MAC-V or JUSPAO." Translated, the references are the United States Operations Mission, dispenser of foreign aid, the Military Assistance Command—Vietnam, which runs the American military effort, including military aid, and the Joint United States Public Affairs Office, which presides over information, propaganda and psychological warfare activities.

For many projects, these four islands in the bureaucratic archipelago lend each other personnel, so it is often difficult to know who is really working for whom. Although the Ambassador heads this "country team," lines of allegiance as well as authority trace back also to the Pentagon via Pacific headquarters, to the State Department, to the Agency for International Development, to the United States Information Agency; add to all this one clandestine line, that of the ubiquitous and supposedly invisible CIA.

Considering the tangle, it can probably be argued that it works remarkably well. But considering the crisis at hand, and its likely duration, a case can be made for some reorganization that might give the men at the top a somewhat less interrupted access to the state of affairs on the spot, and perhaps even provide a [illegible] whose familiarity with it is firsthand and close up.